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MR. ALDRICH'S WRITINGS.

We cannot say that Mr. Aldrich stands at the head of his class, although he would stand there if there was a class, but he stands alone; no other story-writer is in the least like him.—Boston Advertiser.

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I have been reading some of the poems this evening, and find them rich, sweet, and imaginative in such a degree that I am sorry not to have fresher sympathies in order to taste all the delight that every reader ought to draw from them. I was conscious, here and there, of a delicacy that I hardly dared to breathe upon.—NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE.

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THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

CLOTH OF GOLD

AND

OTHER POEMS

Cloth of Gold
Friar Jerome's Beautiful Book
Interludes
Baby Bell and Other Poems
Judith Sonnets

BOSTON

The Riverside Press, Cambridge.

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THIS volume includes all the poems which the author cares to retain of the edition published by Messrs. Ticknor and Fields in 1865.

CAMBRIDGE, MASS., 1874.

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I.

CLOTH OF GOLD.

CLOTH OF GOLD.

PRELUDE.

YOU ask us if by rule or no
Our many-colored songs are wrought?
Upon the cunning loom of thought,
We weave our fancies, so and so.

The busy shuttle comes and goes
Across the rhymes, and deftly weaves
A tissue out of autumn leaves,
With here a thistle, there a rose.

With art and patience thus is made
The poet's perfect Cloth of Gold:
When woven so, nor moth nor mould
Nor time can make its colors fade.

THE CRESCENT AND THE CROSS.

KIND was my friend who, in the Eastern land,
Remembered me with such a gracious hand,
And sent this Moorish Crescent which has been
Worn on the haughty bosom of a queen.

No more it sinks and rises in unrest
To the soft music of her heathen breast ;
No barbarous chief shall bow before it more,
No turbaned slave shall envy and adore.

I place beside this relic of the Sun
A Cross of Cedar brought from Lebanon,
Once borne, perchance, by some pale monk who trod
The desert to Jerusalem, — and his God !

Here do they lie, two symbols of two creeds,
Each meaning something to our human needs,

Both stained with blood, and sacred made by faith,
By tears, and prayers, and martyrdom, and death.

That for the Moslem is, but this for me !
The waning Crescent lacks divinity :
It gives me dreams of battles, and the woes
Of women shut in dim seraglios.

But when this Cross of simple wood I see,
The Star of Bethlehem shines again for me,
And glorious visions break upon my gloom, —
The patient Christ, and Mary at the Tomb !

THE SHEIK'S WELCOME.

BECAUSE thou com'st, a weary guest,
Unto my tent, I bid thee rest.
This cruse of oil, this skin of wine,
These tamarinds and dates are thine ;
And while thou eatest, Medjid, there,
Shall bathe the heated nostrils of thy mare.

Illah il' Allah! Even so
An Arab chieftain treats a foe,
Holds him as one without a fault
Who breaks his bread and tastes his salt ;
And, in fair battle, strikes him dead
With the same pleasure that he gives him bread !

THE UNFORGIVEN.

NEAR my bed, there, hangs the picture jewels could
not buy from me :

'T is a Siren, a brown Siren, in her sea-weed drapery,
Playing on a lute of amber, by the margin of a sea.

In the east, the rose of morning seems as if 't would
blossom soon,

But it never, never blossoms, in this picture ; and the
moon

Never ceases to be crescent, and the June is always
June.

And the heavy-branched banana never yields its creamy
fruit ;

In the citron-trees are nightingales forever stricken
mute ;

And the Siren sits, her fingers on the pulses of the lute.

In the hushes of the midnight, when the heliotropes
grow strong

With the dampness, I hear music, — hear a quiet,
plaintive song, —

A most sad, melodious utterance, as of some immortal
wrong, —

Like the pleading, oft repeated, of a Soul that pleads
in vain,

Of a damnéd Soul repentant, that would fain be pure
again! —

And I lie awake and listen to the music of her pain.

And whence comes this mournful music? — whence, un-
less it chance to be

From the Siren, the brown Siren, in her sea-weed
drapery,

Playing on a lute of amber, by the margin of a sea.

DRESSING THE BRIDE.

A FRAGMENT.

SO, after bath, the slave-girls brought
The broidered raiment for her wear,
The misty izar from Mosul,
The pearls and opals for her hair,
The slippers for her supple feet,
(Two radiant crescent moons they were,)
And lavender, and spikenard sweet,
And attars, nedd, and richest musk.
When they had finished dressing her,
(The eye of morn, the heart's desire!)
Like one pale star against the dusk,
A single diamond on her brow
Trembled with its imprisoned fire!

TWO SONGS FROM THE PERSIAN.

I.

O CEASE, sweet music, let us rest !
Too soon the hateful night is born :
Henceforth let day be counted night,
And midnight called the morn.

O cease, sweet music, let us rest !
A tearful, languid spirit lies,
Like the dim scent in violets,
In beauty's gentle eyes.

There is a sadness in sweet sound
That quickens tears. O music, lest
We weep with thy strange sorrow, cease !
Be still, and let us rest.

II.

Ah ! sad are they who know not love,
But, far from passion's tears and smiles,
Drift down a moonless sea, beyond
The silvery coasts of fairy isles.

And sadder they whose longing lips
Kiss empty air, and never touch
The dear warm mouth of those they love, —
Waiting, wasting, suffering much.

But clear as amber, fine as musk,
Is life to those who, pilgrim-wise,
Move hand in hand from dawn to dusk,
Each morning nearer Paradise.

O, not for them shall angels pray !
They stand in everlasting light,
They walk in Allah's smile by day,
And nestle in his heart by night.

TIGER-LILIES.

I LIKE not lady-slippers,
Nor yet the sweet-pea blossoms,
Nor yet the flaky roses,
 Red, or white as snow ;
I like the chalice'd lilies,
The heavy Eastern lilies,
The gorgeous tiger-lilies,
 That in our garden grow !

For they are tall and slender ;
Their mouths are dashed with carmine
And when the wind sweeps by them,
 On their emerald stalks
They bend so proud and graceful, —
They are Circassian women,
The favorites of the Sultan,
 Adown our garden walks !

And when the rain is falling,
I sit beside the window
And watch them glow and glisten,
 How they burn and glow!
O for the burning lilies,
The tender Eastern lilies,
The gorgeous tiger-lilies,
 That in our garden grow!

THE SULTANA.

I N the draperies' purple gloom,
In the gilded chamber she stands,
I catch a glimpse of her bosom's bloom,
And the white of her jewelled hands.

Each wandering wind that blows
By the lattice, seems to bear
From her parted lips the scent of the rose,
And the jasmine from her hair.

Her dark-browed odalisques lean
To the fountain's feathery rain,
And a paroquet, by the broidered screen,
Dangles its silvery chain.

But pallid, luminous, cold,
Like a phantom she fills the place,
Sick to the heart, in that cage of gold,
With her sumptuous disgrace!

WHEN THE SULTAN GOES TO ISPAHAN.

WHEN *the Sultan Shah-Zaman*
Goes to the city Ispahan,

Even before he gets so far
As the place where the clustered palm-trees are,
At the last of the thirty palace-gates,
The flower of the harem, Rose-in-Bloom,
Orders a feast in his favorite room,—
Glittering squares of colored ice,
Sweetened with syrop, tinctured with spice,
Creams, and cordials, and sugared dates,
Syrian apples, Othmanee quinces,
Limes, and citrons, and apricots,
And wines that are known to Eastern princes;
And Nubian slaves, with smoking pots
Of spiced meats and costliest fish
And all that the curious palate could wish,
Pass in and out of the cedarn doors;

Scattered over mosaic floors
Are anemones, myrtles, and violets,
And a musical fountain throws its jets
Of a hundred colors into the air.
The dusk Sultana loosens her hair,
And stains with the henna-plant the tips
Of her pointed nails, and bites her lips
Till they bloom again; but, alas, *that* rose
Not for the Sultan buds and blows!
Not for the Sultan Shah-Zaman
When he goes to the city Ispahan.

' Then at a wave of her sunny hand,
The dancing-girls of Samarcand
Glide in like shapes from fairy-land,
Making a sudden mist in air
Of fleecy veils and floating hair
And white arms lifted. Orient blood
Runs in their veins, shines in their eyes.
And there, in this Eastern Paradise,
Filled with the breath of sandal-wood,
And Khoten musk, and alocs and myrrh,
Sits Rose-in-Bloom on a silk divan,

Sipping the wines of Astrakhan ;
And her Arab lover sits with her.
*That's when the Sultan Shah-Zaman
Goes to the city Ispahan.*

Now, when I see an extra light,
Flaming, flickering on the night
From my neighbor's casement opposite,
I know as well as I know to pray,
I know as well as a tongue can say,
*That the innocent Sultan Shah-Zaman
Has gone to the city Ispahan.*

HASCHEESH.

I.

STRICKEN with dreams, I wandered through the
 night ;

The heavens leaned down to me with splendid fires ;

The south-wind breathing upon unseen lyres

Made music as I went ; and to my sight

A Palace shaped itself against the skies :

Great sapphire-studded portals suddenly

Opened on vast Ionic galleries

Of gold and porphyry, and I could see,

Through half-drawn curtains that let in the day,

Dim tropic gardens stretching far away.

4
†

II.

Ah ! what a wonder fell upon my soul,

When from that structure of the upper ains

I saw unfold a flight of crystal stairs
For my ascending. . . . Then I heard the roll
Of unseen oceans clashing at the Pole. . . .
A terror seized upon me a vague sense
Of near calamity. "O, lead me hence!"
I shrieked, and lo! from out a darkling hole
That opened at my feet, crawled after me,
Up the broad staircase, creatures of huge size,
Fanged, warty monsters, with their lips and eyes
Hung with slim leeches sucking hungrily. —
Away, vile drug! I will avoid thy spell,
Honey of Paradise, black dew of Hell!

A PRELUDE.

HASSAN BEN ABDUL at the Ivory Gate
Of Bagdad sat and chattered in the sun,
Like any magpie chattered to himself
And four lank, swarthy Arab boys that stopt
A gambling game with peach-pits, and drew near.
Then Iman Khan, the friend of thirsty souls,
The seller of pure water, ceased his cry,
And placed his water-skins against the gate,—
They looked so like him, with their sallow cheeks
Puffed out like Iman's. Then a eunuch came
And swung a pack of sweetmeats from his head,
And stood, — a hideous pagan cut in jet.
And then a Jew, whose sandal-straps were red
With desert-dust, limped, cringing, to the crowd,—
He, too, would listen; and close after him
A jeweller that glittered like his shop.
Then two blind mendicants, who wished to go

Six diverse ways at once, came stumbling by,
But hearing Hassan chatter, sat them down.
And if the Khaleef had been riding near,
He would have paused to listen like the rest,
For Hassan's fame was ripe in all the East.
From white-walled Cairo to far Ispahan,
From Mecca to Damascus, he was known,
Hassan, the Arab with the Singing Heart.
His songs were sung by boatmen on the Nile,
By Beddowee maidens, and in Tartar camps,
While all men loved him as they loved their eyes;
And when he spake, the wisest, next to him,
Was he who listened. And thus Hassan sung.
— And I, a stranger, lingering in Bagdad,
Half English and half Arab, by my beard!
Caught at the gilded epic as it grew,
And for my Christian brothers wrote it down.

A TURKISH LEGEND.

A CERTAIN Pasha, dead five thousand years,
Once from his harem fled in sudden tears,

And had this sentence on the city's gate
Deeply engraven, "Only God is great."

So these four words above the city's noise
Hung like the accents of an angel's voice,

And evermore, from the high barbican,
Saluted each returning caravan.

Lost is that city's glory. Every gust
Lifts, with crisp leaves, the unknown Pasha's dust.

And all is ruin, — save one wrinkled gate
Whereon is written, "Only God is great."

II.

FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK,

ETC.

FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK,
ETC.

FRIAR JEROME'S BEAUTIFUL BOOK.

A. D. 1200.

THE Friar Jerome, for some slight sin,
Done in his youth, was struck with woe.
“When I am dead,” quoth Friar Jerome,
“Surely, I think my soul will go
Shuddering through the darkened spheres,
Down to eternal fires below!
I shall not dare from that dread place
To lift mine eyes to Jesus’ face,
Nor Mary’s, as she sits adored
At the feet of Christ the Lord.
Alas! December’s all too brief
For me to hope to wipe away
The memory of my sinful May!”

And Friar Jerome was full of grief
That April evening, as he lay
On the straw pallet in his cell.
He scarcely heard the curfew-bell
Calling the brotherhood to prayer ;
But he arose, for 't was his care
Nightly to feed the hungry poor
That crowded to the Convent door.

His choicest duty it had been :
But this one night it weighed him down.
“ What work for an immortal soul,
To feed and clothe some lazy clown !
Is there no action worth my mood,
No deed of daring, high and pure,
That shall, when I am dead, endure,
A well-spring of perpetual good ? ”

And straight he thought of those great tomes
With clamps of gold, — the Convent's boast, —
How they endured, while kings and realms
Past into darkness and were lost ;
How they had stood from age to age,

Clad in their yellow vellum-mail,
'Gainst which the Paynim's godless rage,
The Vandal's fire, could naught avail :
Though heathen sword-blows fell like hail,
Though cities ran with Christian blood,
Imperishable they had stood !
They did not seem like books to him,
But Heroes, Martyrs, Saints, — themselves
The things they told of, not mere books
Ranged grimly on the oaken shelves.

To those dim alcoves, far withdrawn,
He turned with measured steps and slow,
Trimming his lantern as he went ;
And there, among the shadows, bent
Above one ponderous folio,
With whose miraculous text were blent
Seraphic faces : Angels, crowned
With rings of melting amethyst ;
Mute, patient Martyrs, cruelly bound
To blazing fagots ; here and there,
Some bold, serene Evangelist,
Or Mary in her sunny hair ;

And here and there from out the words
A brilliant tropic bird took flight ;
And through the margins many a vine
Went wandering, — roses, red and white,
Tulip, wind-flower, and columbine
Blossomed. To his believing mind
These things were real, and the wind,
Blown through the mullioned window, took
Scent from the lilies in the book.

“ Santa Maria ! ” cried Friar Jerome,
“ Whatever man illumined this,
Though he were steeped heart-deep in sin,
Was worthy of mending bliss,
And no doubt hath it ! Ah ! dear Lord,
Might I so beautify Thy Word !
What sacristan, the convents through,
Transcribes with such precision ? who
Does such initials as I do ?
Lo ! I will gird me to this work,
And save me, ere the one chance slips,
On smooth, clean parchment I ’ll engross
The Prophet’s fell Apocalypse ;

And as I write from day to day,
Perchance my sins will pass away."

So Friar Jerome began his Book.
From break of dawn till curfew-chime
He bent above the lengthening page,
Like some rapt poet o'er his rhyme.
He scarcely paused to tell his beads,
Except at night; and then he lay
And tost, unrestful, on the straw,
Impatient for the coming day, —
Working like one who feels, perchance,
That, ere the longed-for goal be won,
Ere Beauty bare her perfect breast,
Black Death may pluck him from the sun.
At intervals the busy brook,
Turning the mill-wheel, caught his ear;
And through the grating of the cell
He saw the honeysuckles peer,
And knew 't was summer, that the sheep
In fragrant pastures lay asleep,
And felt, that, somehow, God was near.
In his green pulpit on the elm,

The robin, abbot of that wood,
Held forth by times; and Friar Jerome
Listened, and smiled, and understood.

While summer wrapt the blissful land
What joy it was to labor so,
To see the long-tressed Angels grow
Beneath the cunning of his hand,
Vignette and tail-piece subtly wrought!
And little recked he of the poor
That missed him at the Convent door;
Or, thinking of them, put the thought
Aside. "I feed the souls of men
Henceforth, and not their bodies!" — yet
Their sharp, pinched features, now and then,
Stole in between him and his Book,
And filled him with a vague regret.

Now on that region fell a blight:
The corn grew cankered in its sheath;
And from the verdurous uplands rolled
A sultry vapor fraught with death, —
A poisonous mist, that, like a pall,

Hung black and stagnant over all.
Then came the sickness, — the malign,
Green-spotted terror called the Pest,
That took the light from loving eyes,
And made the young bride's gentle breast
A fatal pillow. Ah! the woe,
The crime, the madness that befell!
In one short night that vale became
More foul than Dante's inmost hell.
Men curst their wives; and mothers left
Their nursing babes alone to die,
And wantoned, singing, through the streets,
With shameless brow and frenzied eye;
And senseless clowns, not fearing God, —
Such power the spotted fever had, —
Razed Cragwood Castle on the hill,
Pillaged the wine-bins, and went mad.
And evermore that dreadful pall
Of mist hung stagnant over all:
By day, a sickly light broke through
The heated fog, on town and field;
By night, the moon, in anger, turned
Against the earth its mottled shield.

Then from the Convent, two and two,
The Prior chanting at their head,
The monks went forth to shrive the sick,
And give the hungry grave its dead, —
Only Jerome, he went not forth,
But hiding in his dusty nook,
“Let come what will, I must illumine
The last ten pages of my Book!”
He drew his stool before the desk,
And sat him down, distraught and wan,
To paint his daring masterpiece,
The stately figure of Saint John.
He sketched the head with pious care,
Laid in the tint, when, powers of Grace!
He found a grinning Death's-head there,
And not the grand Apostle's face!

Then up he rose with one long cry:
“'T is Satan's self does this,” cried he,
“Because I shut and barred my heart
When Thou didst loudest call to me!
O Lord, Thou know'st the thoughts of men,
Thou know'st that I did yearn to make

Thy Word more lovely to the eyes
Of sinful souls, for Christ his sake!
Nathless, I leave the task undone:
I give up all to follow Thee, —
Even like him who gave his nets
To winds and waves by Galilee!”

Which said, he closed the precious Book
In silence, with a reverent hand;
And drawing his cowl about his face
Went forth into the Stricken Land.
And there was joy in heaven that day, —
More joy o'er this forlorn old friar
Than over fifty sinless men
Who never struggled with desire!

What deeds he did in that dark town,
What hearts he soothed with anguish torn,
What weary ways of woe he trod,
Are written in the Book of God,
And shall be read at Judgment Morn.
The weeks crept on, when, one still day,
God's awful presence filled the sky,

And that black vapor floated by,
And lo! the sickness past away.
With silvery clang, by thorp and town,
The bells made merry in their spires :
O God! to think the Pest is flown!
Men kissed each other on the street,
And music piped to dancing feet
The livelong night, by roaring fires!

Then Friar Jerome, a wasted shape, —
For he had taken the Plague at last, —
Rose up, and through the happy town,
And through the wintry woodlands, past
Into the Convent. What a gloom
Sat brooding in each desolate room!
What silence in the corridor!
For of that long, innumerable train
Which issued forth a month before
Scarce twenty had come back again!

Counting his rosary step by step,
With a forlorn and vacant air,
Like some unshriven churchyard thing,

The Friar crawled up the mouldy stair
To his damp cell, that he might look
Once more on his beloved Book.

And there it lay upon the stand,
Open!—he had not left it so.
He grasped it, with a cry; for, lo!
He saw that some angelic hand,
While he was gone, had finished it!
There 't was complete, as he had planned;
There, at the end, stood *finis*, writ
And gilded as no man could do,—
Not even that pious anchoret,
Bilfrid, the wonderful, nor yet
The miniatore Ethelwold,
Nor Durham's Bishop, who of old
(England still hoards the priceless leaves)
Did the Four Gospels all in gold.
And Friar Jerome nor spoke nor stirred,
But, with his eyes fixed on that word,
He passed from sin and want and scorn;
And suddenly the chapel-bells
Rang in the holy Christmas-Morn!

In those wild wars which racked the land
Since then, and kingdoms rent in twain,
The Friar's Beautiful Book was lost, —
That miracle of hand and brain :
Yet, though its leaves were torn and tost,
The volume was not writ in vain !

THE LADY OF CASTELNORE.

A. D. 1700.

1.

BRÉTAGNE had not her peer. In the Province far
or near

There were never such brown tresses, such a faultless
hand ;

She had youth, and she had gold, she had jewels all
untold,

And many a lover bold wooed the Lady of the Land.

2.

But she, with queenliest grace, bent low her pallid face,
And "Woo me not, for Jesus' sake, fair gentlemen,"
she said,

If they woo'd, then — with a frown she would strike
their passion down :

She might have wed a crown to the ringlets on her
head.

3.

From the dizzy castle-tips, hour by hour she watched
the ships,
Like sheeted phantoms coming and going evermore,
While the twilight settled down on the sleepy seaport
town,
On the gables peaked and brown, that had sheltered
kings of yore.

4.

Dusky belts of cedar-wood partly claspt the widening
flood ;
Like a knot of daisies lay the hamlets on the hill ;
In the hostelry below sparks of light would come and
go,
And faint voices, strangely low, from the garrulous old
mill.

5.

Here the land in grassy swells gently broke : there sunk
in dells
With mosses green and purple, and prongs of rock and
peat ;

Here, in statue-like repose, an old wrinkled mountain
 rose,
With its hoary head in snows, and wild-roses at its
 feet.

6.

And so oft she sat alone in the turret of gray stone,
And looked across the moorland, so woful, to the
 sea,
That there grew a village-cry, how her cheek did lose
 its dye,
As a ship, once, sailing by, faded on the sapphire lea.

7.

Her few walks led all one way, and all ended at the
 gray
And ragged, jagged rocks that fringe the lonesome
 beach ;
There she would stand, the Sweet ! with the white surf
 at her feet,
While above her wheeled the fleet sparrow-hawk with
 startling screech.

8.

And she ever loved the sea, — God's half-uttered mys-
tery, —

With its million lips of shells, its never-ceasing roar :
And t' was well that, when she died, they made her a
grave beside

The blue pulses of the tide, by the towers of Castel-
nore.

9.

Now, one chill November morn, many russet autumns
gone,

A strange ship with folded wings lay dozing off the
lea ;

It had lain throughout the night with its wings of
murky white

Folded, after weary flight, — the worn nursling of the
sea.

10.

Crowds of peasants flocked the sands ; there were tears
and clasping hands ;

And a sailor from the ship stalked through the kirk-
yard gate.

Then amid the grass that crept, fading, over her who
slept,
How he hid his face and wept, crying, *Late, alas! too
late!*

11.

And they called her cold. God knows. . . . Under-
neath the winter snows
The invisible hearts of flowers grow ripe for blossom-
ing!
And the lives that look so cold, if their stories could
be told,
Would seem cast in gentler mould, would seem full of
love and spring.

AMONTILLADO.

VINTAGE, 1826.

1.

RAFTERS black with smoke,
White with sand the floor is,
Fellows from the mines
Calling to Dolores, —
Tawny flower of Spain
Transplanted in Nevada,
Keeper of the wines
In this old posada.

2.

Hither, light-of-foot,
Dolores, Hebe, Circe! —
Pretty Spanish girl,
With not a bit of mercy!

Here I 'm sad and sick,
 Faint and thirsty very,
 And she does n't bring
 The Amontillado Sherry!

3.

Thank you. Breath of June!
 Now my heart beats free, ah!
 Kisses for your hand,
 Amigita mia!
 You shall live in song,
 Ripe and warm and cheery,
 Mellowing with years,
 Like Amontillado Sherry.

4.

Evil spirits, fly!
 Care, begone, blue dragon!
 Only shapes of joy
 Are sculptured on the flagon:
 Lyrics, — repartees, —
 Kisses, — all that 's merry

Rise to touch the lip
In Amontillado Sherry!

5.

Here be worth and wealth,
And love, the arch enchanter;
Here the golden blood
Of saints, in this decanter!
When old Charon comes
To row me o'er his ferry,
I'll bribe him with a ease
Of Amontillado Sherry!

6.

While the earth spins round
And the stars lean over,
May this amber sprite
Never lack a lover.
Blesséd be the man
Who lured her from the berry,
And blest the girl who brings
The Amontillado Sherry!

7.

What! the flagon's dry?

Hark, old Time's confession, —

Both hands crost at XII.,

Owning his transgression!

• Pray, old monk! for all

Generous souls and merry,

May they have their fill

Of Amontillado Sherry!

CASTLES.

THERE is a picture in my brain
That only fades to come again, —
The sunlight, through a veil of rain
 To leeward, gilding
A narrow stretch of brown sea-sand,
A lighthouse half a league from land,
And two young lovers, hand in hand,
 A castle-building.

Upon the budded apple-trees
The robins sing by twos and threes,
And ever, at the faintest breeze,
 Down drops a blossom ;
And ever would that lover be
The wind that robs the burgeoned tree,
And lifts the soft tress daintily
 On Beauty's bosom.

Ah, graybeard, what a happy thing
It was, when life was in its spring,
To peep through love's betrothal ring
 At fields Elysian,
To move and breathe in magic air,
To think that all that seems is fair,—
Ah, ripe young mouth and golden hair,
 Thou pretty vision!

Well, well, I think not on these two
But the old wound breaks out anew,
And the old dream, as if 't were true,
 In my heart nestles ;
Then tears come welling to my eyes,
For yonder, all in saintly guise,
As 't were, a sweet dead woman lies
 Upon the trestles.

INGRATITUDE.

FOUR bluish eggs all in the moss!
Soft-lined home on the cherry-bough!
Life is trouble, and love is loss, —
There's only one robin now.

O robin up in the cherry-tree,
Singing your soul away,
Great is the grief befallen me,
And how can you be so gay?

Long 'ago when you cried in the nest,
The last of the sickly brood,
Scarcely a pinfeather warming your breast,
Who was it brought you food?

Who said, "Music, come fill his throat,
Or ever the May be fled"?

Who was it loved the wee sweet note
And the bosom's sea-shell red?

Who said, "Cherries, grow ripe and big,
Black and ripe for this bird of mine"?
How little bright-bosom bends the twig,
Sipping the black-heart's wine!

Now that my days and nights are woe,
Now that I weep for love's dear sake, —
There you go singing away as though
Never a heart could break!

DECEMBER.

ONLY the sea intoning,
Only the wainscot-mouse,
Only the wild wind moaning
Over the lonely house.

Darkest of all Decembers
Ever my life has known,
Sitting here by the embers,
Stunned and helpless, alone, —

Dreaming of two graves lying
Out in the damp and chill:
One where the buzzard, flying,
Pauses at Malvern Hill;

The other, — alas! the pillows
Of that uneasy bed

Rise and fall with the billows
Over our sailor's head.

Theirs the heroic story, —
Died, by frigate and town!
Theirs the Calm and the Glory,
Theirs the Cross and the Crown.

Mine to linger and languish
Here by the wintry sea.
Ah, faint heart! in thy anguish,
What is there left to thee?

Only the sea intoning,
Only the wainscot-mouse,
Only the wild wind moaning
Over the lonely house.

III.

INTERLUDES.

INTERLUDES.

THE FADED VIOLET.

WHAT thought is folded in thy leaves!
What tender thought, what speechless pain!
I hold thy faded lips to mine,
Thou darling of the April rain!

I hold thy faded lips to mine,
Though scent and azure tint are fled, —
O dry, mute lips! ye are the type
Of something in me cold and dead:

Of something wilted like thy leaves;
Of fragrance flown, of beauty dim;
Yet, for the love of those white hands
That found thee by a river's brim, —

That found thee when thy dewy mouth
Was purpled as with stains of wine, —
For love of her who love forgot,
I hold thy faded lips to mine.

That thou shouldst live when I am dead,
When hate is dead, for me, and wrong,
For this, I use my subtlest art,
For this, I fold thee in my song.

DEAD.

A SORROWFUL woman said to me,
“Come in and look on our child.”

I saw an Angel at shut of day,
And it never spoke, — but smiled.

I think of it in the city's streets,
I dream of it when I rest, —
The violet eyes, the waxen hands,
And the one white rose on the breast!

THE LUNCH.

A GOTHIC window, where a damask curtain
Made the blank daylight shadowy and uncertain :
A slab of agate on four eagle-talons
Held trimly up and neatly taught to balance :
A porcelain dish, o'er which in many a cluster
Black grapes hung down, dead-ripe and without lustre :
A melon cut in thin, delicious slices :
A cake that seemed mosaic-work in spices :
Two China cups with golden tulips sunny,
And rich inside with chocolate like honey :
And she and I the banquet-scene completing
With dreamy words, — and very pleasant eating !

BEFORE THE RAIN.

WE knew it would rain, for all the morn,
A spirit on slender ropes of mist
Was lowering its golden buckets down
Into the vapory amethyst

Of marshes and swamps and dismal fens,—
Scooping the dew that lay in the flowers,
Dipping the jewels out of the sea,
To sprinkle them over the land in showers.

We knew it would rain, for the poplars showed
The white of their leaves, the amber grain
Shrunk in the wind,—and the lightning now
Is tangled in tremulous skeins of rain!

AFTER THE RAIN.

THE rain has ceased, and in my room
The sunshine pours an airy flood ;
And on the church's dizzy vane
The ancient Cross is bathed in blood.

From out the dripping ivy-leaves,
Antiquely carven, gray and high,
A dormer, facing westward, looks
Upon the village like an eye :

And now it glimmers in the sun,
A square of gold, a disk, a speck :
And in the belfry sits a Dove
With purple ripples on her neck.

WEDDED.

(PROVENÇAL AIR.)

THE happy bells shall ring,
Marguerite ;

The summer birds shall sing,
Marguerite ; —

You smile, but you shall wear
 Orange-blossoms in your hair,
Marguerite.

Ah me! the bells have rung,
Marguerite ;

The summer birds have sung,
Marguerite ; —

But cypress leaf and rue
 Make a sorry wreath for you,
Marguerite.

THE BLUEBELLS OF NEW ENGLAND.

THE roses are a regal troop,
And modest folk the daisies ;
But, Bluebells of New England,
To you I give my praises, —

To you, fair phantoms in the sun,
Whom merry Spring discovers,
With bluebirds for your laureates,
And honey-bees for lovers.

The south-wind breathes, and lo ! you throng
This rugged land of ours :
I think the pale blue clouds of May
Drop down, and turn to flowers !

By cottage doors along the roads
You show your winsome faces,

And, like the spectre lady, haunt
The lonely woodland places.

All night your eyes are closed in sleep,
Kept fresh for day's adorning :
Such simple faith as yours can see
God's coming in the morning !

You lead me by your holiness
To pleasant ways of duty ;
You set my thoughts to melody,
You fill me with your beauty.

Long may the heavens give you rain,
The sunshine its caresses,
Long may the woman that I love
Entwine you in her tresses !

NAMELESS PAIN.

IN my nostrils the summer wind
Blows the exquisite scent of the rose:
O for the golden, golden wind,
Breaking the buds as it goes!
Breaking the buds and bending the grass,
And spilling the scent of the rose.

O wind of the summer morn,
Tearing the petals in twain,
Wafting the fragrant soul
Of the rose through valley and plain,
I would you could tear my heart to-day,
And scatter its nameless pain!

AT TWO-AND-TWENTY.

MARIAN, May, and Maud
Have not past me by, —
Archéd foot, and mobile mouth,
And bronze-brown eye!

When my hair is gray,
Then I shall be wise;
Then, thank Heaven! I shall not care
For bronze-brown eyes.

Then let Maud and May
And Marian pass me by:
So they do not scorn me now,
What care I?

GLAMOURIE.

UNDER the night,
In the white moonshine,
Sit thou with me,
By the graveyard tree,
Imogene.

The fire-flies swarm
In the white moonshine,
Each with its light
For our bridal night,
Imogene.

Blushing with love,
In the white moonshine,
Lie in my arms,
So, safe from alarms,
Imogene.

Paler art thou
Than the white moonshine.
Ho! thou art lost, —
Thou lovest a Ghost,
Imogene!

PALABRAS CARIÑOSAS.

(SPANISH AIR.)

GOOD night! I have to say good night
 To such a host of peerless things!
 Good night unto that fragile hand
 All queenly with its weight of rings;
 Good night to fond, uplifted eyes,
 Good night to chestnut braids of hair,
 Good night unto the perfect mouth,
 And all the sweetness nestled there,—
 The snowy hand detains me, then
 I'll have to say Good night again!

But there will come a time, my love,
 When, if I read our stars aright,
 I shall not linger by this porch
 With my adieus. Till then, good night!
 You wish the time were now? And I.
 You do not blush to wish it so?

You would have blushed yourself to death

To own so much a year ago, —

What, both these snowy hands! ah, then

I'll have to say Good night again!

SONG.

1.

O WHERE is our dainty, our darling,
The daintiest darling of all?
Where is the voice on the stairway,
Where is the voice in the hall?
The little short steps in the entry,
The silvery laugh in the hall?
Where is our dainty, our darling,
The daintiest darling of all,
Little Maud?

2.

The peaches are ripe in the orchard,
The apricots ready to fall;
And the grapes reach up to the sunshine
Over the garden-wall.

O rosebud of women! where are you?

(She never replies to our call!)

Where is our dainty, our darling,

The daintiest darling of all,

Little Maud?

MAY.

HEBE 's here, May is here!
The air is fresh and sunny;
And the miser-bees are busy
Hoarding golden honey!

See the knots of buttercups,
And the purple pansies, —
Thick as these, within my brain,
Grow the wildest fancies!

Let me write my songs to-day,
Rhymes with dulcet closes, —
Four-line epics one might hide
In the hearts of roses.

LYRICS.

I.

I HAVE placed a golden
Ring upon the hand
Of the blithest little
Lady in the land!

When the early roses
Scent the sunny air,
She shall gather white ones
To tremble in her hair!

Hasten, happy roses,
Come to me by May, —
In your folded petals
Lies my wedding-day.

II.

THE chestnuts shine through the cloven rind,
And the woodland leaves are red, my dear;

The scarlet fuchsias burn in the wind,—
Funeral plumes for the Year!

The Year which has brought me so much woe
That if it were not for you, my dear,
I could wish the fuchsias' fire might glow
For me as well as the Year.

III.

Out from the depths of my heart
Had arisen this single cry,
Let me behold my beloved,
Let me behold her, and die.

At last, like a sinful soul
At the portals of Heaven I lie,
Never to walk with the blest,
Ah, never! . . . only to die.

HESPERIDES.

IF thy soul, Herrick, dwelt with me,
This is what my songs would be :
Hints of our sea-breezes, blent
With odors from the Orient ;
Indian vessels deep with spice ;
Star-showers from the Norland ice ;
Wine-red jewels that seem to hold
Fire, but only burn with cold ;
Antique goblets, strangely wrought,
Filled with the wine of happy thought ;
Bridal measures, vain regrets,
Laburnum buds and violets ;
Hopeful as the break of day ;
Clear as crystal ; new as May ;
Musical as brooks that run
O'er yellow shallows in the sun ;

Soft as the satin fringe that shades
The eyelids of thy fragrant maids;
Brief as thy lyrics, Herrick, are,
And polished as the bosom of a star.

POE.

HE walked with demons, ghouls, and things
Unsightly . . . terrors and despairs,
And ever in the blackened airs
A dismal raven flapt its wings.

He wasted richest gifts of God.
But here's the limit of his woes, —
Sleep rest him! See, above him grows
The very grass whereon he trod.

Behold! within this narrow grave
Is shut the mortal part of him.
Behold! he could not wholly dim
The gracious genius Heaven gave, —

For strains of music here and there,
Weird murmurings, vague, prophetic tones,
Are blown across the silent zones
Forever in the midnight air.

EPILOGUE.

FRÖM out the blossomed cherry-tops
Sing, blithesome Robin, chant and sing;
With chirp, and trill, and magic-stops
Win thou the listening ear of Spring!

For while thou lingerest in delight, —
An idle poet, with thy rhyme,
The summer hours will take their flight
And leave thee in a barren clime.

Not all the Autumn's brittle gold,
Nor sun, nor moon, nor star shall bring
The jocund spirit which of old
Made it an easy joy to sing!

So said a poet, — having lost
The precious time when he was young, —
Now wandering by the wintry coast
With empty heart and silent tongue.

IV.

BABY BELL AND OTHER POEMS.

BABY BELL AND OTHER POEMS.

BABY BELL.

I.

HAVE you not heard the poets tell
How came the dainty Baby Bell
Into this world of ours?

The gates of heaven were left ajar :

With folded hands and dreamy eyes,

Wandering out of Paradise,

She saw this planet, like a star,

Hung in the glistening depths of even,—

Its bridges, running to and fro,

O'er which the white-winged Angels go,

Bearing the holy Dead to heaven.

She touched a bridge of flowers,— those feet,

So light they did not bend the bells

Of the celestial asphodels,

They fell like dew upon the flowers :
Then all the air grew strangely sweet !
And thus came dainty Baby Bell
 Into this world of ours.

II.

She came and brought delicious May.
 The swallows built beneath the caves ;
 Like sunlight, in and out the leaves
The robins went, the livelong day :
The lily swung its noiseless bell ;
 And o'er the porch the trembling vine
 Seemed bursting with its veins of wine.
How sweetly, softly, twilight fell !
O, earth was full of singing-birds
And opening springtide flowers,
When the dainty Baby Bell
 Came to this world of ours !

III.

O Baby, dainty Baby Bell,
How fair she grew from day to day !
 What woman-nature filled her eyes,

What poetry within them lay, —
 Those deep and tender twilight eyes,
 So full of meaning, pure and bright
 As if she yet stood in the light
 Of those oped gates of Paradise.
 And so we loved her more and more :
 Ah, never in our hearts before
 Was love so lovely born !
 We felt we had a link between
 This real world and that unseen, —
 The land beyond the morn ;
 And for the love of those dear eyes,
 For love of her whom God led forth,
 (The mother's being ceased on earth
 When Baby came from Paradise,) —
 For love of Him who smote our lives,
 And woke the chords of joy and pain,
 We said, *Dear Christ !* — our hearts bent down
 Like violets after rain.

IV.

And now the orchards, which were white
 And red with blossoms when she came,

Were rich in autumn's mellow prime ;
The clustered apples burnt like flame,
The soft-cheeked peaches blushed and fell,
The ivory chestnut burst its shell,
The grapes hung purpling in the grange :
And time wrought just as rich a change
 In little Baby Bell.

Her lissome form more perfect grew,
 And in her features we could trace,
 In softened curves, her mother's face.
Her angel-nature ripened too :
We thought her lovely when she came,
 But she was holy, saintly now . . .
 Around her pale angelic brow
We saw a slender ring of flame !

v.

God's hand had taken away the seal
 That held the portals of her speech ;
And oft she said a few strange words
 Whose meaning lay beyond our reach.
She never was a child to us,
We never held her being's key ;

We could not teach her holy things :
She was Christ's self in purity.

VI.

It came upon us by degrees,
We saw its shadow ere it fell,—
The knowledge that our God had sent
His messenger for Baby Bell.
We shuddered with unlanguage'd pain,
And all our hopes were changed to fears,
And all our thoughts ran into tears
Like sunshine into rain.
We cried aloud in our belief,
“O, smite us gently, gently, God !
Teach us to bend and kiss the rod,
And perfect grow through grief.”
Ah ! how we loved her, God can tell ;
Her heart was folded deep in ours.
Our hearts are broken, Baby Bell !

VII.

At last he came, the messenger,
The messenger from unseen lands :

And what did dainty Baby Bell?
She only crossed her little hands,
She only looked more meek and fair!
We parted back her silken hair,
We wove the roses round her brow, —
White buds, the summer's drifted snow, —
Wrapt her from head to foot in flowers . . .
And thus went dainty Baby Bell
 Out of this world of ours!

PISCATAQUA RIVER.

THOU singest by the gleaming isles,
By woods, and fields of corn,
Thou singest, and the heaven smiles
Upon my birthday morn.

But I within a city, I,
So full of vague unrest,
Would almost give my life to lie
An hour upon thy breast!

To let the wherry listless go,
And, wrapt in dreamy joy,
Dip, and surge idly to and fro,
Like the red harbor-buoy;

To sit in happy indolence,
To rest upon the oars,

And catch the heavy earthy scents
That blow from summer shores ;

To see the rounded sun go down,
And with its parting fires
Light up the windows of the town
And burn the tapering spires ;

And then to hear the muffled tolls
From steeples slim and white,
And watch, among the Isles of Shoals,
The Beacon's orange light.

O River ! flowing to the main
Through woods, and fields of corn,
Hear thou my longing and my pain
This sunny birthday morn ;

And take this song which sorrow shapes
To music like thine own,
And sing it to the cliffs and capes
And crags where I am known !

THE TRAGEDY.

LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS.

L A *Dame aux Camélias*, —
I think that was the play ;
The house was packed from pit to dome
 With the gallant and the gay,
Who had come to see the Tragedy,
 And while the hours away.

There was the ruined Spendthrift,
 And Beauty in her prime ;
There was the grave Historian,
 And there the man of Rhyme,
And the surly Critic, front to front,
 To see the play of crime.

And there was pompous Ignorance,
 And Vice in flowers and lace ;

Sir Cræsus and Sir Pandarus, —
And the music played apace.
But of all that crowd I only saw
A single, single face!

That of a girl whom I had known
In the summers long ago,
When her breath was like the new-mown hay,
Or the sweetest flowers that grow;
When her heart was light, and her soul was white
As the winter's driven snow.

And there she sat with her great brown eyes,
They wore a troubled look;
And I read the history of her life
As it were an open book;
And saw her Soul, like a slimy thing
In the bottom of a brook.

There she sat in her rustling silk,
With diamonds on her wrist,
And on her brow a gleaming thread
Of pearl and amethyst.

“A cheat, a gilded grief!” I said,
And my eyes were filled with mist.

I could not see the players play :
I heard the music moan ;
It moaned like a dismal autumn wind,
That dies in the woods alone ;
And when it stopped I heard it still, —
The mournful monotone !

What if the Count were true or false ?
I did not care, not I ;
What if Camille for Armand died ?
I did not see her die.
There sat a woman opposite
With piteous lip and eye !

The great green curtain fell on all,
On laugh, and wine, and woe,
Just as death some day will fall
’Twixt us and life, I know !
The play was done, the bitter play,
And the people turned to go.

And did they see the Tragedy ?
They saw the painted scene ;
They saw Armand, the jealous fool,
And the sick Parisian queen :
But they did not see the Tragedy, —
The one I saw, I mean !

They did not see that cold-cut face,
That furtive look of care ;
Or, seeing her jewels, only said,
“The lady ’s rich and fair.”
But I tell you, ’t was the Play of Life,
And that woman played Despair !

HAUNTED.

A NOISOME mildewed vine
Crawls to the rotting eaves;
The gate has dropt from the rusty hinge,
And the walks are stamped with leaves.

Close by the shattered fence
The red-clay road runs by
To a haunted wood, where the hemlocks groan
And the willows sob and sigh.

Among the dank lush flowers
The spiteful fire-fly glows,
And a woman steals by the stagnant pond
Wrapt in her burial clothes.

There's a dark blue scar on her throat,
And ever she makes a moan,

And the humid lizards shine in the grass,
And the lichens weep on the stone ;

And the Moon shrinks in a cloud,
And the traveller shakes with fear,
And an Owl on the skirts of the wood
Hoots, and says, Do you hear ?

Go not there at night,
For a spell hangs over all, —
The palsied elms, and the dismal road,
And the broken garden-wall.

O, go not there at night,
For a curse is on the place ;
Go not there, for fear you meet
The Murdered face to face !

PAMPINA.

L YING by the summer sea
I had a dream of Italy.

Chalky cliffs and miles of sand,
Mossy reefs and salty caves,
Then the sparkling emerald waves,
Faded; and I seemed to stand,
Myself a languid Florentine,
In the heart of that fair land.
And in a garden cool and green,
Boccaccio's own enchanted place,
I met Pampina face to face, —
A maid so lovely that to see
Her smile is to know Italy!
Her hair was like a coronet
Upon her Grecian forehead set,
Where one gem glistened sunnily

Like Venice, when first seen at sea.
I saw within her violet eyes
The starlight of Italian skies,
And on her brow and breast and hand
The olive of her native land!

And, knowing how in other times
Her lips were ripe with Tuscan rhymes
Of love and wine and dance, I spread
My mantle by an almond-tree,
And "Here, beneath the rose," I said,
"I'll hear thy Tuscan melody."
I heard a tale that was not told
In those ten dreamy days of old,
When Heaven, for some divine offence,
Smote Florence with the pestilence;
And in that garden's odorous shade
The dames of the Decameron,
With each a loyal lover, strayed,
To laugh and sing, at sorest need,
To lie in the lilies in the sun
With glint of plume and silver brede!
And while she whispers in my ear,

The pleasant Arno murmurs near,
 The dewy, slim chameleons run
 Through twenty colors in the sun;
 The breezes blur the fountain's glass,
 And wake Æolian melodies,
 And scatter from the scented trees
 The lemon-blossoms on the grass.

The tale? I have forgot the tale, —
 A Lady all for love forlorn,
 A rosebud, and a nightingale
 That bruised his bosom on the thorn;
 A jar of rubies buried deep,
 A glen, a corpse, a child asleep,
 A Monk, that was no monk at all,
 In the moonlight by a castle-wall.

Now while the large-eyed Tusean wove
 The gilded thread of her romance, —
 Which I have lost by grievous chance, —
 The one dear woman that I love,
 Beside me in our seaside nook,
 Closed a white finger in her book,

Half vext that she should read, and weep
For Petrarch, to a man asleep!
And scorning me, so tame and cold,
She rose, and wandered down the shore,
Her wine-dark drapery, fold in fold,
Imprisoned by an ivory hand;
And on a ledge of granite, half in sand,
She stood, and looked at Appledore.

And waking, I beheld her there
Sea-dreaming in the moted air,
A siren lithe and debonair,
With wristlets woven of scarlet weeds,
And oblong lucent amber beads
Of sea-kelp shining in her hair.
And as I thought of dreams, and how
The something in us never sleeps,
But laughs, or sings, or moans, or weeps,
She turned, — and on her breast and brow
I saw the tint that seemed not won
From kisses of New England sun;
I saw on brow and breast and hand
The olive of a sunnier land!

She turned,—and, lo! within her eyes
There lay the starlight of Italian skies.

Most dreams are dark, beyond the range
Of reason; oft we cannot tell
If they are born of heaven or hell:
But to my soul it seems not strange
That, lying by the summer sea,
With that dark woman watching me,
I slept and dreamed of Italy!

LAMIA.

“GO on your way, and let me pass.
 You stop a wild despair.

I would that I were turned to brass
 Like that chained lion there,

“Which, couchant by the postern gate,
 In weather foul or fair,
 Looks down serenely desolate,
 And nothing does but stare!

“Ah, what’s to me the burgeoned year,
 The sad leaf or the gay?
 Let Lancelot and Queen Guinevere
 Their falcons fly this day.

“’T will be as royal sport, pardie,
 As falconers have tried

At Astolat, — but let me be!

I would that I had died.

“I met a woman in the glade:

Her hair was soft and brown,
And long bent silken lashes weighed
Her ivory eyelids down.

“I kissed her hand, I called her blest,

I held her leal and fair, —
She turned to shadow on my breast,
And melted into air!

“And, lo! about me, fold on fold,

A writhing serpent hung, —
An eye of jet, a skin of gold,
A garnet for a tongue!

“O, let the petted falcons fly

Right merry in the sun;
But let me be! for I shall die
Before the year is done.”

INVOCATION TO SLEEP.

I.

THERE is a rest for all things. On still nights
 There is a folding of a million wings, —
 The swarming honey-bees in unknown woods,
 The speckled butterflies, and downy broods
 In dizzy poplar heights :
 Rest for innumerable nameless things,
 Rest for the creatures underneath the Sea,
 And in the Earth, and in the starry Air . . .
 Why will it not unburden me of care ?
 It comes to meaner things than my despair.
 O weary, weary night, that brings no rest to me !

II.

Spirit of dreams and silvern memories,
 Delicate Sleep !
 One who is sickening of his tiresome days

Brings thee a soul that he would have thee keep
A captive in thy mystical domain,
With Puck and Ariel, and the grotesque train
That people slumber. Give his sight
Immortal shapes, and bring to him again
His Psyche that went out into the night!

✱

III.

Thou who dost hold the priceless keys of rest,
Strew lotus-leaves and poppies on my breast,
 And bear me to thy castle in the land
Touched with all colors like a burning west, —
The Castle of Vision, where the unchecked thought
Wanders at will upon enchanted ground,
 Making no sound
 In all the corridors . . .

The bell sleeps in the belfry, — from its tongue
A drowsy murmur floats into the air,
Like thistle-down. Slumber is everywhere.
The rook's asleep, and, in its dreaming, caws;
And silence mopes where nightingales have sung;
The Sirens lie in grottos cool and deep,
 The Naiads in the streams :

But I, in chilling twilight, stand and wait
At the portcullis, at thy castle gate,
Yearning to see the magic door of dreams
Turn on its noiseless hinges, delicate Sleep!

SEADRIFT.

SEE where she stands, on the wet sea-sands,
Looking across the water :

Wild is the night, but wilder still

The face of the fisher's daughter !

What does she there, in the lightning's glare,

What does she there, I wonder ?

What dread demon drags her forth

In the night and wind and thunder ?

Is it the ghost that haunts this coast ? —

The cruel waves mount higher,

And the beacon pierces the stormy dark

With its javelin of fire.

Beyond the light of the beacon bright

A merchantman is tacking ;

The hoarse wind whistling through the shrouds,
And the brittle topmasts cracking.

The sea it moans over dead men's bones,
The sea it foams in anger ;
The curlews swoop through the resonant air
With a warning cry of danger.

The star-fish clings to the sea-weed's rings
In a vague, dumb sense of peril ;
And the spray, with its phantom-fingers, grasps
At the mullein dry and sterile.

O, who is she that stands by the sea,
In the lightning's glare, undaunted ? —
Seems this now like the coast of hell
By one white spirit haunted !

The night drags by ; and the breakers die
Along the ragged ledges ;
The robin stirs in its drenchéd nest,
The hawthorn blooms on the hedges.

In shimmering lines, through the dripping pines,
The stealthy morn advances ;
And the heavy sea-fog straggles back
Before those bristling lances !

Still she stands on the wet sea-sands ;
The morning breaks above her,
And the corpse of a sailor gleams on the rocks, —
What if it were her lover ?

THE QUEEN'S RIDE.

AN INVITATION.

'T IS that fair time of year,
Lady mine,
When stately Guinevere,
In her sea-green robe and hood,
Went a-riding through the wood,
Lady mine.

And as the Queen did ride,
Lady mine,
Sir Launcelot at her side
Laughed and chatted, bending over,
Half her friend and all her lover !
Lady mine.

And as they rode along,
Lady mine,

The throstle gave them song,
And the buds peeped through the grass
To see youth and beauty pass!

Lady mine.

And on, through deathless time,

Lady mine,

These lovers in their prime,
(Two fairy ghosts together!)
Ride, with sea-green robe, and feather!

Lady mine.

And so we two will ride,

Lady mine,

At your pleasure, side by side,
Laugh and chat; I bending over,
Half your friend and all your lover!

Lady mine.

But if you like not this,

Lady mine,

And take my love amiss,
Then I'll ride unto the end,

Half your lover, all your friend !

Lady mine.

So, come which way you will,

Lady mine,

Vale, upland, plain, and hill

Wait your coming. For one day

Loose the bridle, and away !

Lady mine.

IN THE OLD CHURCH TOWER.

IN the old church tower
Hangs the bell ;
And above it on the vane,
In the sunshine and the rain,
Cut in gold, St. Peter stands,
With the keys in his claspt hands,
And all is well.

In the old church tower
Hangs the bell ;
You can hear its great heart beat,
Ah ! so loud, and wild, and sweet,
As the parson says a prayer
Over wedded lovers there,
And all is well.

In the old church tower
Hangs the bell ;

Deep and solemn, hark ! again,
Ah, what passion and what pain !
With her hands upon her breast,
Some poor Soul has gone to rest
Where all is well.

In the old church tower
Hangs the bell, —
An old friend that seems to know
All our joy and all our woe ;
It is glad when we are wed,
It is sad when we are dead,
And all is well !

THE METEMPSYCHOSIS.

ABOVE the petty passions of the crowd
 I stand in frozen marble like a god,
 Inviolate, and ancient as the moon.
 The thing I am, and not the thing Man is,
 Fills my deep dreaming. Let him moan and die;
 For he is dust that shall be laid again :
 I know my own creation was divine.
 Strewn on the breezy continents I see
 The veined shells and burnished scales which once
 Enclosed my being, — husks that had their use ;
 I brood on all the shapes I must attain
 Before I reach the Perfect, which is God,
 And dream my dream, and let the rabble go ;
 For I am of the mountains and the sea,
 The deserts, and the caverns in the earth,
 The catacombs and fragments of old worlds.

I was a spirit on the mountain-tops,
 A perfume in the valleys, a simoom

On arid deserts, a nomadic wind
Roaming the universe, a tireless Voice. •
I was ere Romulus and Remus were ;
I was ere Nineveh and Babylon ;
I was, and am, and evermore shall be,
Progressing, never reaching to the end.

A hundred years I trembled in the grass,
The delicate trefoil that muffled warm
A slope on Ida ; for a hundred years
Moved in the purple gyre of those dark flowers
The Grecian women strew upon the dead.
Under the earth, in fragrant glooms, I dwelt ;
Then in the veins and sinews of a pine
On a lone isle, where, from the Cyclades,
A mighty wind, like a leviathan,
Ploughed through the brine, and from those solitudes
Sent Silence, frightened. To and fro I swayed,
Drawing the sunshine from the stooping clouds.
Suns came and went, and many a mystic moon,
Orbing and waning, and fierce meteors,
Leaving their lurid ghosts to haunt the night.
I heard loud voices by the sounding shore,
The stormy sea-gods, and from fluted conchs

Wild music, and strange shadows floated by,
Some moaning and some singing. So the years
Clustered about me, till the hand of God
Let down the lightning from a sultry sky,
Splintered the pine and split the iron rock ;
And from my odorous prison-house a bird,
I in its bosom, darted : so we fled,
Turning the brittle edge of one high wave,
Island and tree and sea-gods left behind !

Free as the air from zone to zone I flew,
Far from the tumult to the quiet gates
Of daybreak ; and beneath me I beheld
Vineyards, and rivers that like silver threads
Ran through the green and gold of pasture-lands,
And here and there a hamlet, a white rose,
And here and there a city, whose slim spires
And palace-roofs and swollen domes uprose
Like scintillant stalagmites in the sun ;
I saw huge navies battling with a storm
By ragged reefs along the desolate coasts,
And lazy merchantmen, that crawled, like flies,
Over the blue enamel of the sea
To India or the icy Labradors.

A century was as a single day.

What is a day to an immortal soul?

A breath, no more. And yet I hold one hour

Beyond all price,—that hour when from the sky

I circled near and nearer to the earth,

Nearer and nearer, till I brushed my wings

Against the pointed chestnuts, where a stream,

That foamed and chattered over pebbly shoals,

Fled through the briony, and with a shout

Leapt headlong down a precipice; and there,

Gathering wild-flowers in the cool ravine,

Wandered a woman more divinely shaped

Than any of the creatures of the air,

Or river-goddesses, or restless shades

Of noble matrons marvellous in their time

For beauty and great suffering; and I sung,

I charmed her thought, I gave her dreams, and then

Down from the dewy atmosphere I stole

And nestled in her bosom. There I slept

From moon to moon, while in her eyes a thought

Grew sweet and sweeter, deepening like the dawn,—

A mystical forewarning! When the stream,

Breaking through leafless brambles and dead leaves,

Piped shriller treble, and from chestnut boughs
The fruit dropt noiseless through the autumn night,
I gave a quick, low cry, as infants do :
We weep when we are born, not when we die !
So was it destined ; and thus came I here,
To walk the earth and wear the form of Man,
To suffer bravely as becomes my state,
One step, one grade, one cycle nearer God.

And knowing these things, can I stoop to fret,
And lie, and haggle in the market-place,
Give dross for dross, or everything for naught ?
No ! let me sit above the crowd, and sing,
Waiting with hope for that miraculous change
Which seems like sleep ; and though I waiting starve,
I cannot kiss the idols that are set
By every gate, in every street and park ;
I cannot fawn, I cannot soil my soul ;
For I am of the mountains and the sea,
The deserts, and the caverns in the earth,
The catacombs and fragments of old worlds.

V.

JUDITH.

6*

JUDITH.

I.

JUDITH IN THE TOWER.

NOW Holofernes with his barbarous hordes
Crossed the Euphrates, laying waste the land
To Esdraclon, and, falling on the town
Of Bethulâ, stormed it night and day
Incessant, till within the leaguered walls
The boldest captains faltered ; for at length
The wells gave out, and then the barley failed,
And Famine, like a murderer masked and cloaked,
Stole in among the garrison. The air
Was filled with lamentation, women's moans
And cries of children ; and at night there came
A fever, parching as a fierce simoom.
Yet Holofernes could not batter down

The brazen gates, nor make a single breach
With beam or catapult in those tough walls :
And white with rage among the tents he strode,
Among the squalid Tartar tents he strode,
And curst the gods that gave him not his will,
And curst his captains, curst himself, and all ;
Then, seeing in what strait the city was,
Withdrew his men hard by the fated town
Amid the hills, and with a grim-set smile
Waited, aloof, until the place should fall.
All day the house-tops lay in sweltering heat ;
All night the watch-fires flared upon the towers ;
And day and night with Israelitish spears
The ramparts bristled.

In a tall square Tower,
Full-fronting on the vile Assyrian camp,
Sat Judith, pallid as the cloudy moon
That hung half-faded in the dreary sky ;
And ever and anon she turned her eyes
To where, between two vapor-haunted hills,
The dreadful army like a caldron seethed.
She heard, far off, the camels' gurgling groan,

The clank of arms, the stir and buzz of camps ;
Beheld the camp-fires, flaming fiends of night
That leapt, and with red hands clutched at the dark ;
And now and then, as some mailed warrior stalked
Athwart the fires, she saw his armor gleam.
Beneath her stretched the temples and the tombs,
The city sickening of its own thick breath,
And over all the sleepless Pleiades.

A star-like face, with floating clouds of hair, —
Merari's daughter, dead Manasses' wife,
Who (since the barley-harvest when he died),
By holy charities, and prayers, and fasts,
Walked with the angels in her widow's weeds,
And kept her pure in honor of the dead.
But dearer to her bosom than the dead
Was Israel, its Prophets and its God :
And that dread midnight, in the Tower alone,
Believing He would hear her from afar,
She lifted up the voices of her soul
Above the wrangling voices of the world :

“ Oh, are we not Thy children who of old

Trod the Chaldean idols in the dust,
And built our altars only unto Thee?

Didst Thou not lead us unto Canaan
For love of us, because we spurned the gods?
Didst Thou not bless us that we worshipped Thee?

And when a famine covered all the land,
And drove us unto Egypt, where the King
Did persecute Thy chosen to the death, —

Didst Thou not smite the swart Egyptians then,
And guide us through the bowels of the deep
That swallowed up their horsemen and their King?

For saw we not, as in a wondrous dream,
The up-tost javelins, the plunging steeds,
The chariots sinking in the wild Red Sea?

O Lord, Thou hast been with us in our woe,
And from Thy bosom Thou hast cast us forth,
And to Thy bosom taken us again:

For we have built our temples in the hills
By Sinai, and on Jordan's flowery banks,
And in Jerusalem we worship Thee.

O Lord, look down and help us. Stretch Thy hand
And free Thy people. Make us pure in faith,
And draw us nearer, nearer unto Thee."

As when a harp-string trembles at a touch,
And music runs through all its quivering length,
And does not die, but seems to float away,
A silvery mist uprising from the string, —
So Judith's prayer rose tremulous in the night,
And floated upward unto other spheres ;
And Judith loosed the hair about her brows,
And bent her head, and wept for Israel.

Now while she wept, bowed like a lotus-flower
That watches its own shadow in the Nile,
A stillness seemed to fall upon the land,
As if from out the calyx of a cloud,
That blossomed suddenly 'twixt the earth and moon,
It fell, — and presently there came a sound
Of many pinions rustling in the dark,
And voices mingling, far and near, and strange
As sea-sounds on some melancholy coast
When first the equinox unchains the Storm.
And Judith started, and with one quick hand
Brushed back the plenteous tresses from a cheek
That whitened like a lily, and so stood,
Nor breathed, nor moved, but listened with her soul ;

And at her side, invisible, there leaned
An Angel mantled in his folded wings,—
To her invisible, but other eyes
Beheld the saintly countenance; for, lo!
Great clouds of spirits swoopt about the Tower
And drifted in the eddies of the wind.
The Angel stoopt, and from his radiant brow,
And from the gleaming amaranth in his hair,
A splendor fell on Judith, and she grew,
From her black tresses to her archéd feet,
Fairer than morning in Arabia.
Then silently the Presence spread his vans,
And rose,—a luminous shadow in the air,—
And through the zodiac, a white star, shot.

As one that wakens from a trance, she turned,
And heard the twilight twitterings of birds,
The wind in the turret, and from far below
Camp-sounds of pawing hoof and clinking steel;
And in the East she saw the early dawn
Breaking the night's enchantment: saw the Moon,
Like some wan sorceress, vanish in mid-heaven,
Leaving a moth-like glimmer where she died.

And Judith rose, and down the spiral stairs
Descended to the garden of the Tower,
Where, at the gate, lounged Achior, lately fled
From Holofernes ; as she past she spoke :
“The Lord be with thee, Achior, all thy days.”
And Achior saw the Spirit of the Lord
Had been with her, and, in a single night,
Worked such a miracle of form and face
As left her lovelier than all womankind
Who was before the fairest in Judæa.
But she, unconscious of God’s miracle,
Moved swiftly on among a frozen group
Of statues that with empty, slim-necked urns
Taunted the thirsty Seneschal, until
She came to where, beneath the spreading palms,
Sat Chabris with Ozias and his friend
Charmis, governors of the leaguered town.
They saw a glory shining on her face
Like daybreak, and they marvelled as she stood
Bending before them with humility.
And wrinkled Charmis murmured through his beard :

“This woman walketh in the smile of God.”

“So walk we all,” spoke Judith. “Evermore
 His light envelops us, and only those
 Who turn aside their faces droop and die
 In utter midnight. If we faint we die.
 O, is it true, Ozias, thou hast sworn
 To yield our people to their enemies
 After five days, unless the Lord shall stoop
 From heaven to help us?”

And Ozias said :

“Our young men die upon the battlements ;
 Our wives and children by the empty tanks
 Lie down and perish.”

“If we faint we die.

The weak heart builds its palace on the sand,
 The flood-tide eats the palace of a fool :
 But whoso trusts in God, as Jacob did,
 Though suffering greatly even to the end,
 Dwells in a citadel upon a rock
 That wind nor wave nor fire shall topple down.”

“Our young men die upon the battlements,”

Answered Ozias; "by the dusty wells
Our wives and children."

"They shall go and dwell
With Seers and Prophets in eternal joy!
Is there no God?"

"One only," Chabris spoke,
"But now His face is darkened in a cloud.
He sees not Israel."

"Is His mercy less
Than Holofernes'? Shall we place our faith
In this fierce bull of Assur? are we mad
That we so tear our throats with our own hands?"
And Judith's eyes flashed battle on the three,
Though all the woman quivered at her lip
Struggling with tears.

"In God we place our trust,"
Said old Ozias, "yet for five days more."

"Ah! His time is not man's time," Judith cried,

“And why should we, the dust about His feet,
Decide the hour of our deliverance,
Saying to Him, *Thus shalt Thou do, and so?*”

Then gray Ozias bowed his head, abashed
That eighty winters had not made him wise,
For all the drifted snow of his long beard:
“This woman speaketh wisely. We were wrong
That in our anguish mocked the Lord our God,
The staff, the scrip, the stream whereat we drink.”
And then to Judith: “Child, what wouldst thou have?”

“I know and know not. Something I know not
Makes music in my bosom; as I move
A presence goes before me, and I hear
New voices mingling in the upper air;
Within my hand there seems another hand
Close-prest, that leads me to yon dreadful camp;
While in my brain the fragments of a dream
Lie like a broken string of diamonds,
The choicest missing. Ask no more. I know
And know not. . . . See! the very air is white
With fingers pointing. Where they point I go.”

She spoke and paused: the three old men looked up
And saw a sudden motion in the air
Of white hands waving; and they dared not speak,
But muffled their thin faces in their robes,
And sat like those grim statues which the wind
Near some unpeopled city in the East
From foot to forehead wraps in desert dust.

“Ere thrice the shadow of the temple slants
Across the fountain, I shall come again.”
Thus Judith softly: then a gleam of light
Played through the silken lashes of her eyes,
As lightning through the purple of a cloud
On some still tropic evening, when the breeze
Lifts not a single blossom from the bough:
“What lies in that unfolded flower of time
No man may know. The thing I can I will,
Leaning on God, remembering how He loved
Jacob in Syria when he fed the flocks
Of Laban, and what miracles He did
For Abraham and for Isaac at their need.
Wait thou the end; and, till I come, keep thou
The sanctuaries.” And Ozias swore

By those weird fingers pointing in the air,
And by the soul of Abraham gone to rest,
To keep the sanctuaries, though she came
And found the bat sole tenant of the Tower,
And all the people bleaching on the walls,
And no voice left. Then Judith moved away,
Her head bowed on her bosom, like to one
That moulds some subtle purpose in a dream,
And in his passion rises up and walks
Through labyrinths of slumber to the dawn.

When she had gained her chamber she threw off
The livery of sorrow for her lord,
The cruel sackcloth that begirt her limbs,
And from those ashen colors issuing forth,
Seemed like a golden butterfly new-slipt
From its dull chrysalis. Then, after bath,
She braided in the darkness of her hair
A thread of opals: on her rounded breast
Spilt precious ointment; and put on the robes
Whose rustling made her pause, half-garmented,
To dream a moment of her bridal morn.
Of snow-white samite were the robes, and rich

With delicate branch-work, silver-frosted star,
And many a broidered lily-of-the-vale.
These things became her as the scent the rose,
For fairest things are beauty's natural dower.
The sun that through the jealous casement stole
Fawned on the Hebrew woman as she stood,
Toyed with the oval pendant at her ear,
And, like a lover, stealing to her lips
Taught them a deeper crimson; then slipt down
The tremulous lilies to the sandal straps
That bound her snowy ankles.

Forth she went,
A glittering wonder, through the crowded streets,
Her handmaid, like a shadow, following on.
And as in summer when the beaded wheat
Leans all one way, and with a longing look
Marks the quick convolutions of the wind,
So all eyes went with Judith as she moved,
All hearts leaned to her with a weight of love.
A starving woman lifted ghostly hands
And blest her for old charities; a child
Smiled on her through its tears; and one gaunt chief

Threw down his battle-axe and doffed his helm,
As if some bright Immortal swept him by.

So forth she fared, the only thing of light
In that dark city, thridding tortuous ways
By gloomy arch and frowning barbican,
Until she reached a gate of triple brass
That opened at her coming, and swung to
With horrid clangor and a ring of bolts.
And there, outside the city of her love,
The warm blood at her pulses, Judith paused
And drank the morning; then with silent prayers
Moved on through flakes of sunlight, through the wood
To Holofernes and his barbarous hordes.

II.

THE CAMP OF ASSUR.

AS on the house-tops of a seaport town,
After a storm has lashed the dangerous coast,
The people crowd to watch some hopeless ship
Tearing its heart upon the unseen reef,
And strain their sight to catch the tattered sail
That comes and goes, and glimmers, till at length
No eye can find it, and a sudden awe
Falls on the people, and no soul may speak :
So, from the windy parapets and roofs
Of the embattled city, anxious groups
Watched the faint flutter of a woman's dress, —
Judith, who, toiling up a distant hill,
Seemed but a speck against the sunny green ;
Yet ever as the wind drew back her robes,
They saw her from the towers, until she reached
The crest, and past into the azure sky.
Then, each one gazing on his neighbor's face,
Speechless, descended to the level world.

Before his tent, stretched on a leopard-skin,
Lay Holofernes, ringed by his dark lords, —
Himself the prince of darkness. At his side
His iron helmet poured upon the grass
Its plume of horsehair; on his ponderous spear,
The flinty barb thrust half its length in earth,
As if some giant had flung it, hung his shield,
And on the burnished eirenit of the shield
A sinewy dragon, rampant, silver-fanged,
Glared horrible with sea-green emerald eyes;
And, as the sunshine struck across it, writhed,
And seemed a type of those impatient lords
Who, in the loud war-council here convened,
Gave voice for battle, and with fiery words
Opposed the cautious wisdom of their peers.
So seemed the restless dragon on the shield.

Baleful and sullen as a sulphurous cloud
Packed with the lightning, Holofernes lay,
Brooding upon the diverse arguments,
Himself not arguing, but listening most
To the curt phrases of the snow-haired chiefs.
And some said: "Take the city by assault,

And grind it into atoms at a blow.”

And some said: “Wait. There’s that within the walls
Shall gnaw its heart out, — hunger. Let us wait.”

To which the younger chieftains: “If we wait,
Ourselves shall starve. Like locusts we have fed
Upon the land till there is nothing left,

Nor grass, nor grain, nor any living thing.

And if at last we take a famished town

With fifty thousand ragged skeletons,

What boots it? We shall hunger all the same. •

Now, by great Baäl, we’d rather die at once

Than languish, scorching, on these sun-baked hills!”

At which the others called them “fretful girls,”

And scoffed at them: “Ye should have stayed at home,

And decked your hair with sunny butterflies,

Like King Arphaxad’s harlots. Know ye not

Patience and valor are the head and heart

Of warriors? Who lacks in either, fails.

Have we not hammered with our catapults

Those stubborn gates? Have we not hurled our men

Against the angry torrent of their spears?

Mark how those birds that wheel above you wood,

In clanging columns, settle greedily down

Upon the uncarthed bodies of our dead.
See where they rise, red-beaked and surfeited !
Has it availed ? Let us be patient, then,
And bide the sovran pleasure of the gods.”
“And when,” quoth one, “our stores of meat are gone,
We’ll even feed upon the tender flesh
Of these tame girls, who, though they dress in steel,
Like more the dulcet tremors of a lute
Than the shrill whistle of an arrow-head.”

At this a score of falchions leapt in air,
And hot-breathed words took flight from bearded lips,
And they had slain each other in their heat,
These savage captains, quick with bow and spear,
But that dark Holofernes started up
To his full height, and, speaking not a word,
With anger-knitted forehead glared at them.
As they shrunk back, their passion and their shame
Gave place to wonder, finding in their midst
A woman whose exceeding radiance
Of brow and bosom made her garments seem
Thre’dbare and lustreless, yet whose attire
Shone like the purples of a Persian queen.

For Judith, who knew all the mountain paths
As one may know the delicate azure veins,
Each crossing each, on his belovéd's wrist,
Had stolen between the archers in the wood
And gained the straggling outskirts of the camp,
And seeing the haughty gestures of the chiefs,
Halted, with fear, and knew not where to turn ;
Then taking heart, had silently approached,
And stood among them, until then unseen.
And in the air, like numerous swarms of bees,
Arose the wondering murmurs of the throng,
Which ehecking, Holofernes turned and cried,
“ Who breaks upon our counsils ? ” angrily,
But drinking then the beauty of her eyes,
And seeing the rosy magic of her mouth,
And all the fragrant summer of her hair
Blown sweetly round her forehead, stood amazed ;
And in the light of her pure modesty
His voice took gentler accent unawares :
“ Whence come ye ? ”

“ From yon city.”

“ By our life,

W^e brought the phœdon of some murdered queen

Had risen from dead summers at our feet!
 If these Judæan women are so shaped,
 Daughters of goddesses, let none be slain.
 What seek ye, woman, in the hostile camps
 Of Assur?"

“Holofernes.”

“This is he.”

“O good my lord,” cried Judith, “if indeed
 That art that Holofernes whom I seek,
 And seeking dread to find, low at thy feet
 Behold thy handmaid, who in fear has flown
 From a doomed people.”

“Wherein thou wert wise
 Beyond the usual measure of thy sex,
 And shalt have such observance as a king
 Gives to his mistress, though our enemy.
 As for thy people, they shall rue the hour
 That brought not tribute to the lord of all,
 Nabuchodonosor. But thou shalt live.”

“O good my lord,” thus Judith, “as thou wilt,
 So would thy handmaid; and I pray thee now

Let those that listen stand awhile aloof,
For I have that for thine especial ear
Most precious to thee." Then the crowd fell back,
Muttering, and half reluctantly, because
Her beauty drew them as the moon the sea, —
Fell back and lingered, leaning on their shields
Under the trees, some couchant in the grass,
Broad-throated, large-lunged Titans overthrown,
Eying the Hebrew woman, whose sweet looks
Brought them a sudden vision of their wives
And longings for them : and her presence there
Was as a spring that, in Sahara's wastes,
Taking the thirsty traveller by surprise,
Loosens its silver music at his feet.
Thus Judith, modest, with down-drooping eyes :

“ My lord, if yet thou holdest in thy thought
The words which Achior the Ammonite
Once spake to thee concerning Israel,
O treasure them, for in them was no guile.
True is it, master, that our people kneel
To an unseen but not an unknown God :
By day and night He watches over us,

And while we worship Him we cannot die,
Our tabernacles shall be unprofaned,
Our spears invincible; but if we sin,
If we transgress the law by which we live,
Our temples shall be desecrate, our tribes
Thrust forth into the howling wilderness,
Scourged and accurséd. Therefore, O my lord,
Seeing this nation wander from the faith
Taught of the Prophets, I have fled dismayed,
For fear the towers might crush me as they fall.
Heed, Holofernes, what I speak this day,
And if the thing I tell thee prove not true
Ere thrice the sun goes down beyond those peaks,
Then straightway plunge thy falchion in my breast,
For 't were 'not meet that thy handmaid should live,
Having deceived the crown and flower of men."

She spoke and paused: and sweeter on his ear
Were Judith's words than ever seemed to him
The wanton laughter of the Assyrian girls
In the bazaars; and listening he heard not
The never-ceasing murmurs of the camp,
The neighing of the awful battle-steeds,

Nor the vain wind among the drowsy palms.
The tents that straggled up the hot hillsides,
The warriors lying in the tangled grass,
The fanes and turrets of the distant town,
And all that was, dissolved and past away,
Save this one woman with her twilight eyes
And the miraculous cadence of her voice.

Then Judith, catching at the broken thread
Of her discourse, resumed, to closer draw
The silken net about the foolish princee ;
And as she spoke, from time to time her gaze
Dwelt on his massive stature, and she saw
That he was shapely, knitted like a god,
A tower beside the men of her own land.

“ Heed, Holofernes, what I speak this day,
And thou shalt rule not only Bethulìa,
Rich with its hundred altars’ crusted gold,
But Cades-Barne, Jerusalem, and all
The vast hill-country even to the sea :
For I am come to give unto thy hands
The key of Israel, — Israel now no more,

Since she disowns her Prophets and her God.

Know then, O lord, it is our yearly use

To lay aside the first fruit of the grain,

And so much oil, so many skins of wine,

Which, being sanctified, are kept intact

For the High Priests who serve before our God

In the great temple at Jerusalem.

This holy food — which even to touch is death —

The rulers, sliding from their ancient faith,

Would fain lay hands on, being wellnigh starved ;

And they have sent a runner to the Priests

(The Jew Ben Raphaim, who, at dead of night,

Shot like a javelin between thy guards),

Bearing a parchment begging that the Church

Yield them permit to eat the sacred corn.

But 't is not lawful they should do this thing,

Yet will they do it. Then shalt thou behold

The archers tumbling headlong from the walls,

Their strength gone from them ; thou shalt see the spears

Splitting like reeds within the spearmen's hands,

And the pale captains tottering like old men

Stricken with palsy. Then, O glorious prince,

Then with thy trumpets blaring doleful dooms,

And thy silk banners flapping in the wind,
With squares of men and eager clouds of horse
Thou shalt swoop down on them, and strike them dead!
But now, my lord, before this come to pass,
Three days must wane, for they touch not the food
Until the Jew Ben Raphaim shall return
With the Priests' message. Here among thy hosts,
O Holofernes, will I dwell the while,
Asking but this, that I and my handmaid
Each night, at the twelfth hour, may egress have
Unto the valley, there to weep and pray
That God forsake this nation in its sin.
And as my prophecy prove true or false,
So be it with me."

Judith ceased, and stood,
Her hands across her bosom, as in prayer;
And Holofernes answered: "Be it so.
And if, O pearl of women, the event
Prove not a dwarf beside the prophecy,
Then there's no woman like thee — no, not one.
Thy name shall be renowned through the world,
Music shall wait on thee, thou shalt have crowns,
And jewel-chests of costly camphor-wood,

And robes as glossy as the ring-dove's neck,
And milk-white mares, and chariots, and slaves :
And thou shalt dwell with me in Nineveh,
In Nineveh, the City of the Gods !”

At which the Jewish woman bowed her head
Humbly, that Holofernes might not see
How blanched her cheek grew. “Even as thou wilt,
So would thy servant.” At a word the slaves
Brought meat and wine, and placed them in a tent,
A silk pavilion, wrought with arabesques,
That stood apart, for Judith and her maid.
But Judith ate not, saying : “Master, no.
It is not lawful that we taste of these ;
My maid has brought a pouch of parchéd corn,
And bread, and figs, and wine of our own land,
Which shall not fail us.” Holofernes said,
“So let it be,” and lifting up the screen
Past out, and left them sitting in the tent.

That day he mixt not with the warriors
As was his wont, nor watched them at their games
In the wide shadow of the terebinth-trees ;

But up and down within a lonely grove
Paced slowly, brooding on her perfect face,
Saying her smooth words over to himself,
Heedless of time, till he looked up and saw
The spectre of the Twilight on the hills.

The fame of Judith's loveliness had flown
From lip to lip throughout the canvas town,
And as the evening deepened, many came
From neighboring camps, with frivolous excuse,
To pass the green pavilion, — long-haired chiefs
That dwelt by the Hydaspe, and the sons
Of the Elymeans, and slim Tartar youths ;
But saw not her, who, shut from common air,
Basked in the twilight of the tapestries.

But when night came, and all the camp was still,
And nothing moved beneath the icy stars
In their blue bourns, except some stealthy guard,
A shadow among shadows, Judith rose,
Calling her servant, and the sentinel
Drew back, and let her pass beyond the lines
Into the valley. And her heart was full,
Seeing the watch-fires burning on the towers

Of her own city : and she knelt and prayed
For it and them that dwelt within its walls,
And was refreshed, — such balm there lies in prayer
For those who know God listens. Straightway then
The two returned, and all the camp was still.

One cresset twinkled dimly in the tent
Of Holofernes, and Bagoas, his slave,
Lay prone across the matting at the door,
Drunk with the wine of slumber ; but his lord
Slept not, or, sleeping, rested not for thought
Of Judith's beauty. Two large lucent eyes,
Tender and full as moons, dawned on his sleep ;
And when he woke, they filled the vacant dusk
With an unearthly splendor. All night long
A stately figure glided through his dream ;
Sometimes a queenly diadem weighed down
Its braided tresses, and sometimes it came
Draped only in a misty cloud of veils,
Like the King's dancing-girls at Nineveh.
And once it bent above him in the gloom,
And touched his forehead with most hungry lips.
Then Holofernes turned upon his couch,
And, yearning for the daybreak, slept no more.

III.

THE FLIGHT.

I^N the far east, as viewless tides of time
Drew on the drifting shallop of the Dawn,
A fringe of gold went rippling up the gray,
And breaking rosily on cliff and spur,
Still left the vale in shadow. While the fog
Folded the camp of Assur, and the dew
Yet shook in clusters on the new green leaf,
And not a bird had dipt a wing in air,
The restless captain, haggard with no sleep,
Stept over the curved body of his slave,
And thridding moodily the dingy tents,
Hives packed with sleepers, stood within the grove,
And in the cool, gray twilight gave his thought
Wings; but however wide his fancies flew,
They circled still the figure of his dream.

He sat: before him rose the fluted domes
Of Nineveh, his city, and he heard

The clatter of the merchants in the booths
Selling their merchandise : and now he breathed
The airs of a great river, sweeping down
Past carven pillars, under tamarisk boughs,
To where the broad sea sparkled : then he groped
In a damp catacomb, he knew not where,
By torchlight, hunting for his own grim name
On some sarcophagus : and as he mused,
From out the ruined kingdom of the Past
Glided the myriad women he had wronged,
The half-forgotten passions of his youth ;
Dark-browed were some, with haughty, sultry eyes,
Imperious and most ferocious loves ;
And some, meek blondes with lengths of flaxen hair, —
Daughters of Sunrise, shaped of fire and snow,
And Holofernes smiled a bitter smile
Seeing these spectres in his revery,
When suddenly one face among the train
Turned full upon him, — such a piteous face,
Blaunched with such anguish, looking such reproach.
So sunken-eyed and awful in its woe,
His heart shook in his bosom, and he rose
As if he felt the hand of Fate behind him stood

Bagoas, the bondsman, bearing in his arms
A jar of water, while the morning broke
In dewy splendor all about the grove.

Then Holofernes, vexed that he was cowed
By his own fantasy, strode back to camp,
Bagoas following, sullen, like a hound
That takes the color of his master's mood.
And with the troubled captain went the shapes
Which even the daylight could not exorcise.

“Go, fetch me wine, and let my soul make cheer,
For I am sick with visions of the night.
Some strangest malady of breast and brain
Hath so unnerved me that a rustling leaf
Sets my pulse leaping. 'Tis a family flaw,
A flaw in men else flawless, this dark spell:
I do remember when my grandsire died,
He thought a lying Ethiop he had slain
Was strangling him; and, later, my own sire
Went mad with dreams the day before his death.
And I, too? Slave! go fetch me seas of wine,
That I may drown these fantasies — no, stay!

Ransack the camps for choicest flesh and fruit,
 And spread a feast within my tent this night,
 And hang the place with garlands of new flowers ;
 Then bid the Hebrew woman, yea or nay,
 To banquet with us. As thou lov'st the light,
 Bring her ; and if indeed the gods have called,
 The gods shall find me sitting at my feast
 Consorting with a daughter of the gods !”

Thus Holofernes, turning on his heel
 Impatiently ; and straight Bagoas went
 And spoiled the camps of viands for the feast,
 And hung the place with flowers, as he was bid ;
 And seeing Judith's servant at the well,
 Gave his lord's message, to which answer came :
 “O what am I that should gainsay my lord ?”
 And Holofernes smiled within, and thought :
 “Or life or death, if I should have her not
 In spite of all, my mighty name would be
 A word for laughter among womankind.”

“So soon !” thought Judith. “Flying pulse, be still !
 O Thou who lovest Israel, give me strength

And cunning such as never woman had,
 That my deceit may be his stripe and scar,
 My kisses his destruction. This for thee,
 My city, Bethulâ, this for thee!"

And thrice that day she prayed within her heart,
 Bowed down among the cushions of the tent
 In shame and wretchedness; and thus she prayed:
 "O save me from him, Lord! but save me most
 From mine own sinful self: for, lo! this man,
 Though viler than the vilest thing that walks,
 A worshipper of fire and senseless stone,
 Slayer of children, enemy of God, —
 He, even he, O Lord, forgive my sin,
 Hath by his heathen beauty moved me more
 Than should a daughter of Judea be moved,
 Save by the noblest. Clothe me with Thy love,
 And rescue me, and let me trample down
 All evil thought, and from my baser self
 Climb up to Thee, that aftertimes may say:
*She tore the guilty passion from her soul, —
 Judith the pure, the faithful unto death."*

Half seen behind the forehead of a crag
The evening-star grew sharp against the dusk,
As Judith lingered by the curtained door
Of her pavilion, waiting for Bagoas :
Erewhile he came, and led her to the tent
Of Holofernes; and she entered in,
And knelt before him in the cresset's glare
Demurely, like a slave-girl at the feet
Of her new master, while the modest blood
Makes protest to the eyelids; and he leaned
Graciously over her, and bade her rise
And sit beside him on the leopard-skins.
But Judith would not, yet with gentlest grace
Would not; and partly to conceal her blush,
Partly to quell the riot in her breast,
She turned, and wrapt her in her fleecy scarf,
And stood aloof, nor looked as one that breathed,
But rather like some jewelled deity
Ta'en by a conqueror from its sacred niche,
And placed among the trappings of his tent, —
So pure was Judith.

For a moment's space
She stood, then stealing softly to his side,

Knelt down by him, and with uplifted face,
Whereon the red rose blossomed with the white:
“This night, my lord, no other slave than I
Shall wait on thee with fruits and flowers and wine.
So subtle am I, I shall know thy wish
Ere thou canst speak it. Let Bagoas go
Among his people: let me wait and serve,
More happy as thy handmaid than thy guest.”

Thereat he laughed, and, humoring her mood,
Gave the black bondsman freedom for the night.
Then Judith moved, obsequious, and placed
The meats before him, and poured out the wine,
Holding the golden goblet while he ate,
Nor ever past it empty; and the wine
Seemed richer to him for those slender hands.
So Judith served, and Holofernes drank,
Until the lamps that glimmered round the tent
In mad processions danced before his gaze.

Without, the moon dropt down behind the sky;
Within, the odors of the heavy flowers,
And the aromas of the mist that curled

From swinging cressets, stole into the air ;
And through the mist he saw her come and go,
Now showing a faultless arm against the light,
And now a dainty sandal set with gems.
At last he knew not in what place he was.
For as a man who, softly held by sleep,
Knows that he dreams, yet knows not true from false,
Perplext between the margins of two worlds,
So Holofernes, flushed with the red wine.

Like a bride's eyes, the eyes of Judith shone,
As ever bending over him with smiles
She filled the generous chalice to the edge ;
And half he shrunk from her, and knew not why,
Then wholly loved her for her loveliness,
And drew her close to him, and breathed her breath ;
And once he thought the Hebrew woman sang
A wine-song, touching on a certain king
Who, dying of strange sickness, drank, and past
Beyond the touch of mortal agony, —
A vague tradition of the cunning sprite
That dwells within the circle of the grape.
And thus he heard, or fancied that he heard : —

“The small green grapes in countless clusters grew,
Feeding on mystic moonlight and white dew
And mellow sunshine, the long summer through :

“Till, with faint tremor in her veins, the Vine
Felt the delicious pulses of the wine ;
And the grapes ripened in the year’s decline.

“And day by day the Virgins watched their charge ;
And when, at last, beyond the horizon’s marge,
The harvest-moon droopt beautiful and large,

“The subtle spirit in the grape was caught,
And to the slowly dying Monarch brought,
In a great cup fantastically wrought,

“Whereof he drank ; then straightway from his brain
Went the weird malady, and once again
He walked the Palace, free of scar or pain, —

“But strangely changed, for somehow he had lost
Body and voice : the courtiers, as he crost
The royal chambers, whispered, — *The King’s Ghost !*”

“A potent medicine for kings and men,”
Thus Holofernes; “he was wise to drink.
Be thou as wise, fair Judith.” As he spoke,
He stoopt to kiss the treacherous soft hand
That rested like a snow-flake on his arm,
But stooping reeled, and from the place he sat
Topped, and fell among the leopard-skins:
There lay, nor stirred; and ere ten beats of heart,
The tawny giant slumbered.

Judith knelt

And gazed upon him, and her thoughts were dark;
For half she longed to bid her purpose die,—
To stay, to weep, to fold him in her arms,
To let her long hair loose upon his face,
As on a mountain-top some amorous cloud
Lets down its sombre tresses of fine rain.
For one wild instant in her burning arms
She held him sleeping; then grew wan as death,
Relaxed her hold, and starting from his side
As if an asp had stung her to the quick.
Listened; and listening, she heard the moans
Of little children moaning in the streets

Of Bethulîa, saw famished women pass,
Wringing their hands, and on the broken walls
The flower of Israel dying.

With quick breath

Judith blew out the tapers, all save one,
And from his twisted girdle loosed the sword,
And grasping the huge hilt with her two hands,
Thrice smote the Prince of Assur as he lay,
Thrice on his neck she smote him as he lay,
And from the brawny shoulders rolled the head
Winking and ghastly in the cresset's light ;
Which done, she fled into the yawning dark,
There met her maid, who, stealing to the tent,
Pulled down the crimson arras on the corse,
And in her mantle wrapt the brazen head,
And brought it with her ; and a great gong boomed
Twelve, as the women glided past the guard
With measured footstep : but outside the camp,
Terror seized on them, and they fled like wraiths
Through the hushed midnight into the black woods,
Where, from gnarled roots and ancient, palsied trees,
Dread shapes, upstarting, clutched at them ; and on

A nameless bird in branches overhead
Screeched, and the blood grew cold about their hearts.
By mouldy caves, the hooded viper's haunt,
Down perilous steeps, and through the desolate gorge,
Onward they flew, with madly streaming hair,
Bearing their hideous burden, till at last,
Wild with the pregnant horrors of the night,
They dashed themselves against the City's gate.

The hours dragged by, and in the Assur camp
The pulse of life was throbbing languidly,
When from the outer waste an Arab scout
Rushed pale and breathless on the morning watch,
With a strange story of a Head that hung
High in the air above the City's wall, —
A livid Head, with knotted, snake-like curls, —
And how the face was like a face he knew,
And how it turned and twisted in the wind,
And how it stared upon him with fixt orbs,
Till it was not in mortal man to stay;
And how he fled, and how he thought the Thing
Came bowling through the wheat-fields after him.
And some that listened were appalled, and some

Derided him; but not the less they threw
A furtive glance toward the shadowy wood.

Bagoas, among the idlers, heard the man,
And quick to bear the tidings to his lord,
Ran to the tent, and called, "My lord, awake!
Awake, my lord!" and lingered for reply.
But answer came there none. Again he called,
And all was still. Then, laughing in his heart
To think how deeply Holofernes slept
Wrapt in soft arms, he lifted up the screen,
And marvelled, finding no one in the tent
Save Holofernes, buried to the waist,
Head foremost in the canopies. He stoopt,
And drawing back the damask folds beheld
His master; the grim giant, lying dead.

As in some breathless wilderness at night
A leopard, pinioned by a falling tree,
Shrieks, and the echoes, mimicking the cry,
Repeat it in a thousand different keys
By lonely heights and unimagined caves,
So shrieked Bagoas, and so his cry was caught

And voiced along the vast Assyrian lines,
And buffeted among the hundred hills.
Then ceased the tumult sudden as it rose,
And a great silence fell upon the camps,
And all the people stood like blocks of stone
In some deserted quarry; then a voice
Blown through a trumpet clamored: *He is dead!*
The Prince is dead! The Hebrew witch hath slain
Prince Holofernes! Fly, Assyrians, fly!

As from its lair the mad tornado leaps,
And, seizing on the yellow desert sands,
Hurls them in swirling masses, cloud on cloud,
So, at the sounding of that baleful voice,
A panic seized the mighty Assur hosts,
And flung them from their places.

With wild shouts
Across the hills in pale dismay they fled,
Trampling the sick and wounded under foot,
Leaving their tents, their camels, and their arms,
Their horses, and their gilded chariots.
Then with a dull metallic clang the gates
Of Bethulïa opened, and from each

A sea of spears surged down the arid hills
And broke remorseless on the flying foe, —
Now hemmed them in upon a river's bank,
Now drove them shrieking down a precipice,
Now in the mountain-passes slaughtered them,
Until the land, for many a weary league,
Was red, as in the sunset, with their blood.
And other cities, when they saw the rout
Of Holofernes, burst their gates, and joined
With trump and banner in the mad pursuit.
Three days before those unrelenting spears
The cohorts fled, but on the fourth they past
Beyond Damascus into their own land.

So, by God's grace and this one woman's hand,
The tombs and temples of the Just were saved ;
And evermore throughout fair Israel
The name of Judith meant all noblest things
In thought and deed ; and Judith's life was rich
With that content the world takes not away.
And far-off kings, enamoured of her fame,
Bluff princes, dwellers by the salt sea-sands,
Sent caskets most laboriously carved

Of ivory, and papyrus scrolls, whereon
Was writ their passion; then themselves did come
With spiey caravans, in purple state,
To seek regard from her imperial eyes.
But she remained unwed, and to the end
Walked with the angels in her widow's weeds.

VI.

SONNETS.

SONNETS.

EUTERPE.

NOW if Euterpe held me not in scorn,
I'd shape a lyric, perfect, fair, and round
As that thin band of gold wherewith I bound
Your slender finger our betrothal morn.
Not of Desire alone is music born,
Not till the Muse wills is our passion crowned :
Unsought she comes, if sought but seldom found.
Hence is it Poets often are forlorn,
Taciturn, shy, self-immolated, pale,
Taking no healthy pleasure in their kind, —
Wrapt in their dream as in a coat-of-mail.
Hence is it I, the least, a very hind,
Have stolen away into this leafy vale
Drawn by the flutings of the silvery wind.

AT BAY RIDGE, LONG ISLAND.

PLEASANT it is to lie amid the grass
Under these shady locusts, half the day,
Watching the ships reflected on the Bay,
Topmast and shroud, as in a wizard's glass :
To see the happy-hearted martins pass,
Brushing the dew-drops from the lilac spray :
Or else to hang enamoured o'er some lay
Of fairy regions : or to muse, alas !
On Dante, exiled, journeying outworn ;
On patient Milton's sorrowfulest eyes
Shut from the splendors of the Night and Morn :
To think that now, beneath the Italian skies,
In such clear air as this, by Tiber's wave,
Daisies are trembling over Keats's grave.

PURSUIT AND POSSESSION.

WHEN I behold what pleasure is Pursuit,
What life, what glorious eagerness it is;
Then mark how full Possession falls from this,
How fairer seems the blossom than the fruit, —
I am perplext, and often stricken mute
Wondering which attained the higher bliss,
The wingéd insect, or the chrysalis
It thrust aside with unreluctant foot.
Spirit of verse, that still elud'st my art,
Thou airy phantom that dost ever haunt me,
O never, never rest upon my heart,
If when I have thee I shall little want thee!
Still flit away in moonlight, rain, and dew,
Will-o'-the-wisp, that I may still pursue!

EGYPT.

FANTASTIC Sleep is busy with my eyes :
I seem in some waste solitude to stand
Once ruled of Cheops : upon either hand
A dark illimitable desert lies,
Sultry and still, — a realm of mysteries ;
A wide-browed Sphinx, half buried in the sand,
With orbless sockets stares across the land,
The woofulest thing beneath these brooding skies,
Where all is woeful, weird-lit vacancy.
'Tis neither midnight, twilight, nor moonrise.
Lo ! while I gaze, beyond the vast sand-sea
The nebulous clouds are downward slowly drawn,
And one bleared star, faint-glimmering like a bee,
Is shut in the rosy outstretched hand of Dawn.

MIRACLES.

SICK of myself and all that keeps the light
Of the blue skies away from me and mine,
I climb this ledge, and by this wind-swept pine
Lingering, watch the coming of the night.
'T is ever a new wonder to my sight.
Men look to God for some mysterious sign,
For other stars than those that nightly shine,
For some unnatural symbol of His might : —
Wouldst see a miracle as grand as those
The prophets wrought of old in Palestine ?
Come watch with me the shaft of fire that glows
In yonder West ; the fair, frail palaces,
The fading alps and archipelagoes,
And great cloud-continents of sunset-seas.

FREDERICKSBURG.

THE increasing moonlight drifts across my bed,
And on the churchyard by the road, I know
It falls as white and noiselessly as snow. . .
'T was such a night two weary summers fled ;
The stars, as now, were waning overhead.
Listen! Again the shrill-lipped bugles blow
Where the swift currents of the river flow
Past Fredericksburg: far off the heavens are red
With sudden conflagration: on yon height,
Linstock in hand, the gunners hold their breath:
A signal-rocket pierces the dense night,
Flings its spent stars upon the town beneath:
Hark! — the artillery massing on the right,
Hark! — the black squadrons wheeling down to Death!

BY THE POTOMAC.

THE soft new grass is creeping o'er the graves
By the Potomac; and the crisp ground-flower
Lifts its blue cup to catch the passing shower;
The pine-cone ripens, and the long moss waves
Its tangled gonfalons above our graves.
Hark, what a burst of music from yon bower! —
The Southern nightingale that, hour by hour,
In its melodious summer madness raves.
Ah, with what delicate touches of her hand,
With what sweet voices, Nature seeks to screen
The awful Crime of this distracted land, —
Sets her birds singing, while she spreads her green
Mantle of velvet where the Murdered lie,
As if to hide the horror from God's eye.

L'ENVOI.

THIS is my Youth,—its hopes and dreams.
How strange and shadowy it all seems,
After these many years!
Turning the pages idly, so,
I look with smiles upon the woe,
Upon the joy with tears!

Go, little Book. The old and wise
Will greet thee with suspicious eyes,
With stare, or furtive frown ;
But here and there some golden maid
May like thee . . . thou'lt not be afraid
Of young eyes, blue or brown.

To such a one, perchance thou'lt sing
As clearly as a bird in spring
Hailing the apple-blossom ;
And she will let thee make thy nest,
Perhaps, within her snowy breast.
Go ; rest thou in her bosom.

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